

Aristocracy: Nobles Rule The earliest rulers of city-states were probably chieftains or kings who were military leaders. By the end of Greece's Dark Ages, most city-states were ruled by **aristocrats**, members of the rich and powerful families. Aristocrats controlled most of the good land. They could afford horses, chariots, and the best weapons to make themselves stronger than others.

A New Type of Ruler As the Greeks sailed to foreign ports trading olive oil, marble, and other products, the city-states became richer. A middle class of merchants and artisans developed. They wanted some say in the government of their cities. These people could not afford to equip themselves with horses and chariots for war. However, they could afford armor, swords, and spears. With these weapons, large groups of soldiers could fight effectively on foot. Gradually, military strength in the cities shifted from aristocrats to merchants and artisans.

As a result of these changes, aristocratic governments were often overthrown and replaced by rulers called tyrants. A **tyrant** was a ruler who seized power by force. Tyrants were usually supported by the middle and working classes. Today, we think of tyrants as being cruel and violent. That was true of some Greek tyrants, but others ruled wisely and well.

Democracy: Rule by the People Eventually, the people of many city-states overthrew tyrants who were too harsh. A few cities moved to a form of government called **democracy**. In a democracy, citizens govern themselves. The city-state in which democracy was most fully expressed was Athens.

▼ The Acropolis in Athens was known for its beautiful temples. It was also a fortress. During wartime, people moved to the Acropolis where the enemy could not easily reach them.

